

## The Champion

Ricardo loved soccer, and he could hardly wait until tomorrow's championship game. His team was going to be playing their rival, the Tigers.

The Tigers had won the league title the past two years. Ricardo knew a few of the players on that team, and they always bragged about how they were the champions. This year, he just knew it was going to be different. He would finally give them a reason to be silent when they saw him. He would finally give his father something that would make his father proud of him.

Ricardo had missed the championship game two years earlier when he was sick with a horrible flu. He had tried to convince his mother that he would be able to play, but she wouldn't hear of it. She wouldn't even let him sit on the sidelines and watch the game; he was too sick. He had to wait for his best friends Rex and Sara to come tell him all about the loss after the game. It had been one of the most miserable days of his life, especially when he remembered how much his father had been looking forward to the game.

Last year he had to miss the championship game because his cousin Lucinda was graduating from college. His whole family had insisted that he attend the graduation to celebrate Lucinda's accomplishments. When Ricardo heard his father agree that he needed to go to the graduation, he knew that it was no use trying to argue.

This time, Ricardo was really feeling the pressure. It was the last year he would be in the elementary school league. If his team didn't win this year, they would never have another chance. Both teams were undefeated, and this one game would decide the championship. The winners would all get medals, and their names would be written on a trophy that was in a glass case at the city library.

Ricardo had dreamed about seeing his name on that trophy. His father had been on a championship team when he was eleven and had his name on a trophy. Whenever they went to the library, he always caught his father looking over at the trophy with a smile on his face. Ricardo often thought he saw disappointment in his father's eyes when he looked away from the trophy case and looked down at his son. Each time the thought crossed his mind, he renewed his desire to win the championship too.

It meant more to him than almost anything he could think of. That day at school, Ricardo couldn't get thoughts of the championship game out of his mind. As he sat in class, he kept thinking about how he would feel when they hung a winner's medal around his neck. He dreamed about meeting his father's eyes and knowing that he'd made him proud. Mrs. Peterson stopped by his desk during reading time and asked, "Did you bring a

book today, Ricardo?"

Surprised, Ricardo said, "Oh, sorry. I'll get it out."

All during reading time, his eyes moved over the words on the page, but none of them seemed to make any sense. The recess bell rang, and he didn't even notice. His friends Rex and Sara came over to his desk. Rex poked him in the arm and said, "Come on!"

They walked out to the playground. "Let's go play for a while," Sara said, pointing to a group playing soccer on the field.

Ricardo was having too much fun dreaming about his championship medal. He just shook his head and said, "Go ahead. I don't feel like it."

Sara shrugged, and she and Rex ran off toward the field, shouting at their friends to kick the ball their way. Ricardo sat down to watch, all the while dreaming about how great it would feel to win the championship. The rest of the day continued in much the same way. Ricardo got lost when Mrs. Peterson was explaining some new math concept about decimals, and he had no idea what was going on in music class.

Finally, the last bell of the day rang, and he was free to go home and dream some more. He told Sara and Rex he would see them at the soccer field the next morning and then quickly waved goodbye, not waiting for them as he normally did. Instead, Ricardo walked home by himself, lost in thought. He didn't notice the cars rushing by. He didn't notice the people on the sidewalk. He didn't even notice the large sign that said, "Caution: Construction ahead" when he walked by it.

Suddenly, Ricardo felt the ground disappear from under his feet. He fell to the ground, twisting his ankle painfully as he dropped into a large ditch that suddenly appeared directly in front of him.

Ricardo let out a yelp when he landed and lay there a moment, trying to catch his breath. All he could think about was the game, and the image of his father's eyes full of disappointment were like a knife in his heart.

As the construction workers rushed over to help him up, he made up his mind. He wouldn't tell anyone what had happened. He would be tough. No matter how much it hurt, he wouldn't let on that he wasn't ready to play in the championship game. It meant too much.

The walk home took much longer than usual. Not only was Ricardo limping as he tried to keep weight off his injured ankle, but he also needed to be sure not to let Rex and Sara catch sight of him. This meant he ended up taking a longer way home.

When he finally got to his house, Ricardo heaved a big sigh of relief. His mother wasn't there, and he knew he had several hours before his father was expected home from work. Ricardo dug through his dresser, searching for a scarf he hadn't used since

the previous winter. Once he found it, he wrapped it tightly around his ankle, and then put on a pair of his baggiest long pants and thick socks that went all the way up to his knees.

He decided to eat an early dinner and then sit in the living room watching TV. If he were lucky, his parents wouldn't question him when he told them he'd already eaten and was going to go to bed early to rest up for the game. Once they were safely out of sight eating their own dinner, Ricardo figured he could make his way to his room without anyone noticing his injury.

The plan worked perfectly. Before he knew it, Ricardo was tucked in bed, his tightly wrapped ankle safely hidden from view. He smiled as he lay there in the darkness. Then he began to worry about what he was doing. Things might work out, or they might not.

Ricardo's ankle was still hurting the next morning when he woke up, but he knew that he couldn't let anyone know about his injury. He got up really early, ate a bowl of cereal, and left a note for his parents: "Gone to the game. Wish me luck!" With that, he went out the door and very carefully made his way to the soccer field.

He was already at the field sitting on the sidelines when the rest of the players started to arrive. Rex and Sara ran over as soon as they saw him. "Hey, come warm up with us," they shouted.

As soon as Ricardo started to make his way out to the field where his best friends were waiting, he knew it was going to be harder to hide his injury than he'd let himself believe. He could stand the pain when he walked, but there was no way he'd be able to do well at running or kicking a soccer ball.

Ricardo felt his heart sink. As he looked around at his teammates, he realized that he couldn't pretend not to be injured. It wouldn't be fair to the rest of his team. He blinked back tears as he thought about how he would break the news to his father. Maybe he could just not go home. That might be easier than facing the disappointment in his father's eyes.

Of course, deep inside, he knew that wasn't a very good choice. He took a deep breath and hobbled over to where his coach was standing near several other men. "Excuse me, sir," Ricardo began. "I injured myself yesterday and I'm not going to be able to play. Is there something else I can do to help the team out today?"

Much to his great surprise, when his coach turned around, Ricardo saw that one of the men he'd been talking to was Ricardo's own father! He froze. How would his dad react to the news that his son wouldn't be playing in the most important game of the year?

Even before that thought had time to settle into his mind, Ricardo realized that everything was going to be fine. His father smiled and gave his shoulder a squeeze. "I'm proud of you, son," he said. "There are many ways to show you are a champion. Today you

showed that you have the courage to do the right thing. That makes you a champion in my mind."

Later that morning, as he sat with his father in the stands watching Sara kick the winning goal, Ricardo thought to himself that his father was right. Doing the right thing for his team meant more than any individual medal.

- 1. Where did Ricardo expect to see his name if his team won the championship game?**
  - A. On TV sports.
  - B. On a trophy.
  - C. In the newspaper.
- 2. Why did Ricardo miss playing in the championship game held two years earlier?**
  - A. He was sick at home with the flu.
  - B. He was out of town with his family.
  - C. He had to attend his cousin's wedding.
- 3. Why was Ricardo feeling a lot of pressure to win the championship this year?**
  - A. His friends were counting on him to take the team to victory.
  - B. Next year he would be too old to play in the same league again.
  - C. He would be too busy with homework the next year to play soccer.
- 4. What was Ricardo's most important reason for wanting to win the championship?**
  - A. He wanted his father to be proud of him.
  - B. He wanted to be known by everyone as a champion.
  - C. He wanted to get even with the team that won the year before.
- 5. Why did Ricardo miss playing in the championship game held one year earlier?**
  - A. He was starting to get sick and had to stay home.
  - B. He was out of town with his father and mother.
  - C. He had to attend a graduation ceremony.

**6. What did Ricardo think his father was feeling when he looked at Ricardo in the library?**

- A. He knew Ricardo would soon have his name on the championship trophy.
- B. He was proud of Ricardo for trying so hard to be a champion player.
- C. He was disappointed that Ricardo's name wasn't on the trophy.

**7. What was Ricardo's father like?**

- A. He loved his son and understood what was most important for him.
- B. He cared more about the soccer than he did about his son.
- C. He would only be proud of Ricardo if he won a championship medal.

**8. What did Ricardo do after school the day before the game that was different than usual?**

- A. He went to the soccer field to think about the big game.
- B. He walked home alone instead of walking with his friends.
- C. He stayed after school to practice soccer with his friends.

**9. What main conflict did Ricardo have to deal with when he decided that he wouldn't play in the championship game?**

- A. How he was going to tell his coach about it.
- B. How he was going to tell his friends about it.
- C. How he thought his father would feel about it.

**10. How did Ricardo feel about his relationship with his father?**

- A. He thought that his father would always feel disappointed in him until he became a soccer champion.
- B. He thought his father would like him more if he could do everything well, especially his schoolwork.
- C. He thought his father didn't care about Ricardo being a champion, but he would be happy if he were a great player.



- 11. Why did Ricardo decide not to tell anyone about his injury?**
- A. He was too embarrassed to tell anyone about it.
  - B. He wanted to play in the game even if it hurt.
  - C. He thought it would heal before the game.
- 12. What was Ricardo's father smiling about when he and Ricardo were at the library?**
- A. He felt happy to be at the library spending time with his son.
  - B. He was pleased that his name was on the championship trophy.
  - C. He thought it was cute that Ricardo was so worried about the game.
- 13. What was the main problem in this story?**
- A. Ricardo didn't understand how his father felt about him.
  - B. Ricardo wanted to be a champion soccer player more than anything.
  - C. Ricardo hurt his ankle but still wanted to play in the soccer game.
- 14. What was Ricardo thinking when he fell into the ditch?**
- A. He was in so much pain he couldn't think about anything except getting help.
  - B. He was angry with himself for not paying attention to where he was walking.
  - C. He might not be able to play in the game, and his father would be disappointed.
- 15. What was the reason that Ricardo decided he shouldn't play in the championship game?**
- A. It would be unfair to the team if he couldn't play as well as usual.
  - B. He would be embarrassed if everyone thought he was a bad soccer player.
  - C. He was afraid that he wouldn't be able to stand the pain if his ankle got worse.
- 16. What made Ricardo a champion in the eyes of his father?**
- A. Ricardo volunteered to help the team some way other than playing in the game.
  - B. Ricardo figured out that it would be foolish and dangerous to play and make his injury worse.
  - C. Ricardo decided that it was more important to put the team before his own desires.

- 17. When did Ricardo discover that he would have to make a decision about whether he should play in the game?**
- A. When he ran out on the field and kicked the soccer ball.
  - B. When he left home to go to the championship soccer game.
  - C. When he walked out on the soccer field to join his friends.
- 18. How did Ricardo feel about his plan to wrap his ankle and go to bed early so his parents wouldn't find out that he was injured?**
- A. He was happy that he could fool his parents and was sure he could fool everyone the next day too.
  - B. He thought the plan was good, but he was unsure about whether it would solve his problem of not being able to play.
  - C. He was sure he was doing the right thing and went to sleep smiling that his plan was working.
- 19. What was Ricardo's day at school like?**
- A. He spent the whole day thinking only about how his father would feel when Ricardo won a medal.
  - B. He was having a bad day because he got into trouble for not bringing his reading book to class.
  - C. He was nervous about the game and spent most of his free time talking and playing with his friends.
- 20. What was this story mostly about?**
- A. A father who was a champion soccer player and wanted his son to be one too.
  - B. A young boy who had the wrong idea about how his father really felt about him.
  - C. What it means to play on a soccer team with friends and win a championship game.